o promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which here in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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The Rural Clergyman as a Parish Leader

By E. J. Niederfrank*

Let's look at this theme from four angles:

First, by parish do we mean a church constituency or a whole community? Are the terms "parish," "church constituency," and "community" synonymous? They may be; or they may not be in cases where two or more churches operate over the same local territory. The first essential of parish leadership in the broad sense, I believe, is to have a community viewpoint, not simply the viewpoint of a church constituency, church program, or parish in the narrow sense.

By community I do not mean simply territory, but the total welfare of people--an interest in farming, in homemaking, in rural health, in community living, in soil conservation, in local public problems, in human relationships and better understanding--an interest in all these for making richer human personality, a more enjoyable farm and community life, a better world.

I believe that whatever the church situation is in particular cases--whether there are one, two, or half a dozen churches, and whatever denominations --the clergyman is first of all a constituency leader, a church program leader. He has to be; he should be--let's be realistic about that. But if he has a community viewpoint, both as to territory and as to human welfare, it will help him to be both a better leader of his constituency and also to render more valuable leadership to the community as a whole.

For the second angle of our topic--the rural clergyman can be a community leader, along with being the leader of his church constituency. He ought to be both; simply parish or constituency leadership--the PBMB minister (preaching, baptizing, marrying, burying type)--is not enough today. Society is much more complex than it used to be. The church is only one of many concerns. Therefore, the work of the local church and the interest and leadership of the minister must be broader and deeper today than in years past if they are to be effective.

The rural community as a whole needs the kind of leadership that a minister can, or ought to be able, to give. He is in a strategic position to mold

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public opinion, to stimulate ideas and actions for the benefit of the community, to help leaders and groups analyze community situations, to encourage farmers and farm women toward better farming and homemaking, and to help them make use of the Extension Service or other public and private agencies in the county.

The clergyman can do much along these lines simply in his sermons, if nothing else. But there are other ways, too. I know of ministers or church organizations that influence and sponsor 4-H clubs, the cooperative idea, hold study courses on current affairs, serve on community councils, promote soil conservation and other worthy causes. Just last week I was with the Negro pastors in southern Maryland--fifty of them--who were having a conference to discuss what community projects they might initiate and how.

For the clergyman to have a part in programs for community improvement is not merely to carry on social work unrelated to religion and the church. It is leadership--for better living and for better people. And these, after all, are vitally akin to the purposes of religion, the maintenance of the church, and the perpetuation of Christian culture. If the clergyman persisted today in holding only to the narrower "parish," "constituency," or "church" viewpoint--apart from the total culture of the community--he would be derelict of duty. It is just this sort of thing that causes many people to criticize the church and say that it's falling down on its job or that it is "behind the times." And they would be correct; the church, and especially the rural church, must be closely related to and vitally interested in the total culture in which it operates.

One thing which weakens the leadership of local pastors is that so many church programs come down from top denominational headquarters. Pastors can be so concerned with the details of these top church programs that they and their local church program operate in a vacuum apart from the community itself. The challenge to the rural pastor is to use imagination in adapting top church programs and ideas to his local situation.

A third angle of our theme is that the clergyman must know his community. This is essential to deciding on what to do and how to do it. I believe that a minister ought to know his community as to general territory.

The community is all the area within which people live who have more or less common attachments and carry on certain main activities together, such as schooling, grocery trade, mail delivery, church attendance, and other local activities. The community may be the township, or it may be only some part of a township, or an area that overlaps parts of two or more townships. And there are some cases where the county is tending to become the only real community of the people. The important thing for clergymen is that the rural community is not merely the village or town center, but that it includes the country people who live in the hinterland of that community. Sometimes ministers and other workers fail to see all the people in a community; their church becomes village-centered or tends to cater to only certain classes or segments of the population.

Recently, I heard of a minister who wrote to the rural sociologist at a state university, saying that his name could now be taken off the mailing list as he had changed posts and was no longer a rural minister (he had moved into a town of about 600 population!).

The clergyman also ought to be familiar with the main county and community organizations that serve his people. He should be familiar with the Extensio

Service and 4-H clubs. There are also the public welfare department and welfare organizations, such as the Red Cross, the farm cooperative associations and other farm groups, the PTA, the school board and school superintendent, and the county and town libraries that serve the people of his community. The clergyman can learn about almost any aspect of farm life or about any farm agency by talking with the county Extension Service agents. These people are busy, but many of them realize that they should know the ministers of the county. Therefore, go half-way yourself and get acquainted.

The local clergyman should know <u>who the natural leaders and officials of the community are</u>--the people whom others more or less recognize as "starters" or who are influential in getting things done. New ideas, new projects, should always be presented first to the key folks. This principle is especially important in cases where one wants to get next to a certain social class or section of the community which has been hard to reach otherwise. Endeavor to identify its key folks. Some groups are hard to reach through leaders to whom they do not feel an attachment.

Sometimes the minister is himself a key leader of the community. He is often in a strategic position to be so; that is why he should exercise community leadership. But his leadership has to be exercised very carefully--in subtle ways, especially if he is of recent tenure. In such cases, he may be considered as a "newcomer" or "outsider" by the "old stock." We know examples where a new community project or church practice has failed because the minister pushed in as a leader too hard, too soon. The clergyman must be of the community--of his people --before he can successfully be an active leader. Before that, he must exercise leadership and influence in subtle ways, and always through other people.

The clergyman <u>should also know the cultural background of the people</u>: their controlling ideas and traditions; their basis of pride and psychological security; what their hopes and ambitions are as groups and as families; the factors upon which they rank folks, such as land tenure, income, nationality, length of residence, family ties, or other factors. Generally, a minister knows this quite well for his own congregation, but he does not know it for the whole community. If the community is made up of, say, half old American stock and half French-Canadian, some of which are now mixed; or German Catholic and Scandinavian Lutherans; or perhaps half dairy farmers and half mill people--this should mean something to the clergyman. Then there is the community history, the changes and the trends now underway. All this is also important for interpreting conditions, attitudes, and leadership.

An essential to the clergyman's being a community leader is that he know well the nature of the community--its area, its social organization, its key people and channels of communication or leadership, and its cultural background. Frequently, occasions arise in which he has to take, or should take, one or more of these things into account.

Most of this information can be obtained by talking with local people, the county agent, the school superintendent, welfare official, and other key persons. Such persons can usually also supply data from census reports, research studies, school records, and other sources. Every clergyman should have a map of the county and community showing roads and houses; it can usually be obtained from the state department of highways for a few cents.

Finally, a <u>fourth</u> angle to this matter of being a parish or community leader is that the clergyman <u>must have a spirit of working together--a sense of</u>

group process and a certain "know-how" about how to do so. The suggestion of ideas, the setting up of committees, the handling of meetings, the selection of leaders, the motivation of persons and turning over of responsibilities to them, the stimulating and guiding of discussion, the matter of when to say the right word and do the right thing at the right time--all these are vitally important to effective leadership. About so much of all this can be learned from study and conferences, or in similar ways. Much has to be learned from the hard knocks of experience.

The clergyman must also have a sound concept of what leadership is, and of his role as a community leader. He is what Sanderson termed the "professional" or paid leader from outside, in contrast to the local lay, "natural" leader. The clergyman should be a specialist on the religious side, and as such is a pastor not a "leader." But on the community leadership side his role is that of leader. The proper function of such a leader is that of stimulator, guide, and positive force, not one who conceives community programs as his own. This concept of leadership is important, for it is basic in human nature to abhor excess authority. No person or institution practicing excess authority will succeed long unless there are compensating values. The person doing so will pass into oblivion; the institution doing so will continue only as it replenishes its membership to replace those who lose interest as they become less dependent on it, especially succeeding generations.

To sum up, we have said briefly four things about this matter of clergymen as community leaders: (1) they can and ought to be community leaders, not merely "preaching, baptizing, marrying, burying parsons"; (2) to be good leaders requires that they have the community viewpoint; (3) they need to know their community pretty well; and (4) they should have a wholesome concept of leadership and a sense of how to work with people in group processes.

Let us close with the quotation:

"WHEN A MAN ENLARGES HIS EFFORT, GOD ENLARGES HIM."

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